

## Famous Kansan



*Clyde Cessna*  
1879-1954

Clyde Cessna liked to build things. His friends knew him as a "genius with a monkey wrench." Cessna could fix almost anything, but he most liked fixing machines. Once, Cessna went to see an "air circus." He saw airplanes doing stunts and he was excited! Cessna wanted to learn to build airplanes, too.



Clyde Cessna decided to build an airplane so he could learn to fly. He named his first airplane *Silver Wings*. It took time to build the airplane and it took more time to learn to fly. In his first 12 flights Cessna crashed the airplane every time! Each time he crashed he would rebuild his plane and try again. Soon Cessna became a skilled pilot.

After he had learned to fly, Clyde Cessna decided to design and build airplanes for other people. At that time most of the airplanes being built were biplanes. That means they had two wings on each side of the plane. Cessna knew there was a better way. He designed an airplane with only one wing on each side.

Clyde Cessna was a pioneer of aviation in Wichita. Cessna was also a businessman. He joined with other pilots, Walter Beech and Lloyd Stearman, to form the Wichita Travel Air Company. Together the men built many airplanes. Cessna worked with them for only a few years before he started his own company. He called it Cessna Aircraft Company. Cessna Aircraft used the monoplane design to build airplanes. Those planes could fly longer and faster than most other planes of the time.

Today Cessna Aircraft Company is one of the largest makers of small aircraft in the world. Cessna Aircraft Company still makes airplanes in Kansas – in Wichita. Clyde Cessna was ahead of his time with his monoplane design. Cessna airplanes have been used to train more pilots than any other kind of airplane.